

Facilitator:

1. Open with Prayer
2. Welcome any newcomers
3. Try to keep your discussion to an hour and a half at the most.

CONNECT Group study questions for March 19, 2017

Title: How to share your story—Acts 26

Review: A mature disciple of Jesus Christ does four things consistently:

Loves God

Loves Others

Loves Ministry

Loves the Lost

Children:

When did you first hear about Jesus? Who are some people in your life who have told you their story about Jesus saving them?

Have you ever made a decision to follow Jesus as your Savior? If so, tell us about it! How old were you? What did you do? Who else was there?

If you HAVE made a decision to follow Jesus, how has your life changed since you became a Christian?

Some notes: *Encourage kids to share, and you will be inspired! The work of the Holy Spirit in kids' lives as they come to a saving knowledge of Jesus is truly wonderful and amazing to see. Remember that when a child (or anyone!) is ready to make a decision for Christ, it is a miracle of God, and not something we can manufacture.*

Children, especially young ones, are extremely eager to please adults in their life, so it is important not to pressure a child into "saying a prayer" or to assure them that they are a child of God BEFORE they have truly developed an understanding of their need for repentance and a Savior. Let them hear the grown-ups' testimonies of how Jesus saved them and continue to reinforce the basics (confession of sin, repentance, and belief in Jesus Christ for salvation).

If you, as the facilitator think a specific family, youth, or child, would benefit from a pastoral follow-up, please let Garfield, Christine, or Jennifer know. We'd love to connect with them! Thanks!

Read: Acts 26

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

"I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blasphemous, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

"In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they

should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am —except for these chains.”

Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Facilitator: These questions are heavy with Scripture references. Encourage you group members to find them in their Bibles, read them, and list them and others for future reference when they witness.

Question: Pastor Peppy told us that our most powerful tool to be an effective witness for Christ is our personal testimony.

What if your testimony is not that great? You weren't knocked to the ground. You didn't see a bright light or hear God speak. By human standards you may have been a good, upstanding person, but you knew you needed Jesus and so you received him. Does that make your witness less effective than someone who sinned greatly and came to faith in Christ in some dramatic way? Why, or why not?

Question: What first motivated you to receive Jesus Christ as your savior? Did the witness of a Christian have a part in your decision? Share with the group the circumstances that brought you to that moment. What Scripture passages did the Holy Spirit use to speak truth to you?

Question: The decision to turn from the old life and embrace Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life (John 14:1-7) always results in change—sometimes immediately, sometimes gradually.

How and when did you begin to realize you were different as a result of receiving Jesus Christ as your savior? Are you still changing? How are you doing with that?

Question: Answers to the previous questions should have given you the words to be a witness to someone who doesn't know Jesus Christ.

If you challenge them to receive Jesus and they say yes, but ask how, would you be able to guide them to a decision? How would you do it? Where would you start? **Facilitator:** Ask members of the group to look up and **Read:** Romans 3:23 (we're all sinners); Romans 6:23 (sin leads to death); John 3:16 (but God loves us); Ephesians 2:8-9 (salvation is a gift); John 1:12 (belong to a new family) to stimulate ideas about leading someone to Christ. Ask members to share passages of Scripture they would use, and encourage them to take notes and compile a list.

Question: Many people come to Christ thinking that's all there is to it. No one explained that their decision was just the beginning of a new life that needs to be nurtured.

How would you advise them in their new life? **Read:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Peter 2:1-3; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:12-13.